

Juvenile Justice Commission

Update

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A Message From Executive Director Beyer

Education is the foundation of New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Commission. When a child is taken out of his or her home and placed in the custody of the Commission, many freedoms are taken away – and rightly so. Education, however, is one of the only things in life that we can give a youth that cannot be taken away – ever. We realize that a high school diploma will open more doors for these youth than almost anything else that we can give them.



Juveniles placed in the custody of the Commission go to school just about every day – even in the summer. Education is that important. Nothing comes before reading, job readiness, vocational education, skill training and SAT preparation. It is these tools that will help our young people succeed back in their communities.

I want to thank Office of Education Director Robert V. Cote', Ed.D. for his strong leadership in this critical area. I also want to recognize the dedication and commitment of our teachers and education staff. We know that your job often goes beyond teaching, and because of that every day you have the opportunity to make a

difference in the lives of our youth – what you do and say makes a difference.

The Commission could not do its job without you, our teachers. Whether you teach at a JJC facility, a county detention center, or community program – you, our teachers, are the lifeblood of the Juvenile Justice Commission.

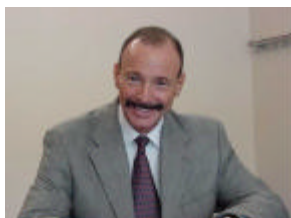
Office of Education

The Office of Education has selected just a few initiatives to share with you. I hope that these give you a sense of what we are achieving every day at the Commission through education.

The JJC's Office of Education does more than provide learning opportunities for juveniles in JJC custody. By collaborating with other integral components of the Juvenile Justice Commission, including the Division of Local Programs and Services and the Division of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services, the Office of Education is expanding its role.

The Division of Local Programs and Services has been working with several counties to implement unique programs that serve as alternative placements to the JJC. As the State Incentive Programs in Union, Essex, Middlesex, Camden and Passaic Counties get under way, they rely on the services of qualified JJC teachers to fulfill the education requirements for their participants.

The Office of Education also provides technical assistance to Juvenile Parole and Transitional



Protecting the Public, Serving Youth

Services in the area of school re-entry. New initiatives under way in Camden and Paterson help JJC residents get back into the school system more easily and quickly. JJC education staff is on hand to help facilitate the transfers.

Coordination with Home School Districts

The JJC education staff work directly with students' school districts back home to ensure that they are keeping up with the curriculum being taught in their sending districts. This makes it easier for a student to return to his or her home school when released. This coordination has also allowed more and more JJC students to gain their high school diplomas from their home schools while in the custody of the Commission.

MOUS Certification

Through a partnership with the Communication Workers of America Transition to Apprenticeship Program (CWATAP), and in collaboration with the Department of Education and the NJ Department of Labor, the Juvenile Justice Commission has set up two MOUS Certification Testing Centers.

The acronym MOUS stands for Microsoft Office User Specialist. It is an accredited exam that is recognized worldwide. The Microsoft Corporation issues certifications recognizing various levels of expertise in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, Outlook, and FrontPage. These certifications open up a plethora of high-tech positions to JJC youth seeking employment after their release.

Poetry Slams

Many of you are familiar with the Commission-wide poetry contest which results in an annual poetry publication. At the Edison Prep Residential Community Home, students are taking this a step further by participating in the

Poetry Slam phenomenon that is sweeping the country. Poetry Slams are contests in which poets perform original works and are judged by audience members. A local poet provides weekly instruction to Edison Prep students who are encouraged through reading and writing activities to express themselves through poetry. Other JJC programs will be invited to attend a final Poetry Slam performed by the students of Edison Prep.

Home Builders Institute

The JJC has partnered with the Home Builders Institute to operate Project CRAFT, a vocational/work training and job placement program at the New Jersey Training School (NJTS). The goal of Project CRAFT is the immediate and long-term employment of the students in the building industry where a wide variety of opportunities and growth tracks are available to graduates. Project CRAFT incorporates the apprenticeship concept of hands-on training in combination with academic instruction. Under the supervision of journey-level trade instructors, students learn marketable, residential construction skills while completing community service construction projects.

Gang Awareness Education Program

Almost every youth who comes to the JJC has been exposed to gang activity. While he or she may not actually be a member of a gang, the Commission believes in being proactive. If we can demystify the gang subculture before it takes hold, we can help more youth make the proper choices for their future.

It is also critical that our partners in the community understand the gang subculture and its impact on every community. The Commission has received funding through the NJ Department of Education to develop a Gang Awareness Education Program. The program

provides gang related information to counties, local municipalities, businesses, educators and interested community entities. The initiative is three-fold, incorporating training for staff, outreach for communities, and the development and implementation of a curriculum for students.

The Commission treats gang involvement as an addiction – much like that of chemical substances. With the assistance of an outside research group, a tailor-made curriculum entitled PHOENIX is being implemented. The curriculum addresses specific risk factors and aims to prevent the return to gang involvement. In order to meet the varying needs of youth, customized versions of the curriculum have been developed for juvenile female secure care facilities, county juvenile detention centers, community residential/day programs, residential drug programs and parole programs.

Anti-Violence Workshops

The JJC has begun a new Anti-Violence Workshop in conjunction with the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. This program gives judges the option to require first-time male and female offenders to meet for face-to-face conversations with residents of the JJC residential community homes.

Ten to fifteen JJC students, both male and female, are selected to participate in each session. These students meet with the JJC Anti-Violence Workshop facilitator to prepare for varying scenarios and themes that may arise during the meetings held at the Mercer County Court House.

The 2-hour session is divided into three phases: 1) JJC students speaking with first time offenders; 2) JJC students speaking with offenders' parents and 3) all participants sharing their thoughts together. JJC students are encouraged to share their experiences with incarceration and to process the issues that arise

using the techniques they learn in their own Guided Group Interaction sessions.

NJTS Eye Lab

Did you know that all the eyeglass needs of both the Juvenile Justice Commission and the NJ Department of Corrections are met by the Optical Technicians Training Laboratory at the New Jersey Training School? This unique science program offers JJC residents the opportunity to become skilled in all phases of eyeglass fabrication. After completing this program, several of our students have gained employment upon their release with nationally known businesses such as LensCrafters. In addition to meeting the eyeglass needs of the JJC and NJDOC, we have recently entered into a special project for the Department of Environmental Protection. Through this program, NJTS residents make special eyeglass units for the breathing apparatuses for hazmat specialists.

The JJC continues to appreciate the generosity of the local branch of the Lions Club International. The Lions are recognized worldwide for their service to the blind and visually impaired as well as their commitment to provide opportunities to youth for achievement, learning, contribution and service. For the past 18 years, they have provided supplies and equipment in the lab as well as scholarships that have allowed our students to pursue careers in the optical field.

Respect & Dignity

Just as every JJC employee will receive Respect and Dignity Training, so, too will our juvenile residents. The Office of Education has identified a curriculum that will be used in both secure and residential programs to help youth understand the lifelong benefits of proper conduct.

The staff training explains that our employees are to treat our residents and fellow staff members with respect and dignity. Similarly, this education program explains to our residents that they are expected to treat the staff and their fellow residents with the same respect and dignity that they are shown.

Christmas at the JJC

Almost every JJC program participated in a special project for the holidays – from singing Christmas carols at hospitals to baking cookies for church groups. We would like to share with you the good cheer that the girls from the Juvenile Female Secure Care and Intake Facility (JFSC-Hayes Unit) spread this holiday season.

As part of the Commission's Community Collaboration Initiative, the residents of JFSC are developing an on-going relationship with the Clare Estate Assisted Living Facility in Bordentown. Projects such as the ones described below allow our residents to provide much needed services and to be good neighbors to the communities of which they are a part.

JFSC residents, with the help of their teachers, made throw-pillows and dolls that brought comfort and compassion to those in need during the holiday season – when they're often needed most.



To make the decorative throw pillows, the students cut the patterns, stuffed the material, used sewing machines to put them together and added frill to the edges. Our young ladies have also crafted miniature dolls that can be used as covers for room deodorizers for the residents of the assisted care facility.

Ninety percent of the Clare Estate Assisted Care Facility residents are women who do not have many visitors or have limited contact with family members. In an effort to bring them companionship and allow our residents to learn from and develop a respect for this generation, letters written by JFSC residents accompanied each gift. Each letter included holiday greetings, as well as an invitation to correspond with the resident in return. If all goes well, we will soon have on-going "pen pal" relationships with the assisted care residents.

For the third year in a row, students in the JFSC crafts classes have painted cardboard boxes in various holiday designs. Students in the Family and Consumer Sciences classes then baked holiday cookies to fill the boxes. The gift boxes were distributed to various JJC departments and administrators.

Names in the News Sally Flanagan

Sally Flanagan, Transition Specialist/AED Coordinator, was recently honored by the Red Cross



From left to right: Ann M. Lent, American Red Cross of Central NJ; Margie Brown, JJC Office of Education; William J. Noonan; American Red Cross of Central NJ; Sally Flanagan, JJC Office of Education & 2002 Pacesetter Award Recipient

of Central New Jersey at the Pacesetter Awards Ceremony at the Hyatt Regency in Princeton. The theme of the evening was

"Every Day Heroes Can Make a Difference". The JJC's Sally Flanagan surely fits the bill.

Mrs. Flanagan has volunteered in the community for 24 years instructing people in life-saving skills. As her husband, the JJC's own Tom Flanagan, Director of Investigations, readily admits, "Everyone knows that if they ask

for Sally's help, she won't turn them down". As a result, Sally is routinely called upon to teach CPR to organizations, such as Boy Scouts, local fire departments, lifeguards, school nurses and teachers. She has volunteered countless hours to make her community a better and safer place.

Mrs. Flanagan's skills have not gone unnoticed by the JJC, either. Not only has she worked with our juvenile residents at Edison Prep and the Stabilization and Reintegration Program to certify them in CPR, but she was an integral part of the leadership team that developed the JJC's defibrillator program. Of course, it only made sense to ask Mrs. Flanagan to train JJC staff to use the four JJC-owned defibrillators in case of an emergency.

Due to her selflessness, dedication and skill, hundreds of individuals have received the training necessary to empower them to save lives. Sally Flanagan is an example of the many unique and giving individuals who make up the Education Division of the Juvenile Justice Commission.

Community Programs' Staff Training

The goal of the JJC's ongoing Community Programs Staff Training Course is to provide a curriculum and learning environment that will enhance the knowledge and skill levels of community program staff, thereby helping the staff better do their jobs and ultimately increasing the effectiveness of community programs. The training consists of six weeks of classroom and two weeks of site-specific instruction. The Training Unit completed its sixth cycle of training in October.

The following summarizes key findings of a focus group conducted with five JJC staff who participated as part of Cycle 5 of the Community Programs' Staff Training course. The focus group is part of an ongoing Research &

Evaluation Unit effort – working closely with the Policy and Training Unit, and Operations – to better understand the usefulness and impact of the training course. Additional focus groups will involve, separately, staff and program administrators.

When asked about the training experience, all trainees said that their expectations for the training had been met. Almost everyone who participated said that it helped them do their job better and it taught them more about youth and how to deal with them. They all gave high marks to the instructors. They *liked* the friendships made and the strong sense of "bonding" that grew among trainees. We were also told what they didn't like. Some said they disliked redundancy across topics, and said that some sessions went too long; some disliked the inconvenience of traveling far to get to the training site. Several people mentioned that they would like the training to be shorter – but wouldn't drop any topics!

The focus group participants (who all had been back to the Units for several months) were asked whether what they learned from the training had proven useful for them in their jobs. This is, of course, the critical point! The short answer, for all of the trainees, is that the training *has* made a difference in performing their jobs. Some important ways training helped:

- It made them more *confident* in their ability to work with and relate to juveniles and made them "sharper" in carrying out their day to day responsibilities. Greater confidence led to feeling better about their jobs!
- Part of their confidence came from a better understanding of the difficult array of problems experienced by JJC youth, and why they may have gotten into trouble with the law.

- Participants said they are now more skilled at defusing anger and gaining control over negative situations through “de-escalation” techniques. They also respond more effectively to positive behavior – with more focus on providing incentives for and praising youth for good behavior.
- Until all community program staff members are trained and understand the program, we know that full implementation of these changes may take time. However, as trained staff try to use what they’ve learned, the training has helped them in their interactions with other staff and their administrators. Improved knowledge of JJC policies, a major focus of the curriculum, has led to a sense of empowerment in assisting other staff, and in confronting and changing behavior/practices that they know are wrong.

The conclusions of this initial focus group research are positive: participants gained important knowledge and skills from the training, and find them useful on the job.

New ID Badges

The Juvenile Justice Commission is proud to announce that it is entering into the realm of



digitized employee identification cards for all civilian, custody, contracted

and volunteer personnel. This initiative will be one of many groundbreaking technological steps that will take the JJC into the 21st century. Previously, JJC identification cards used a Polaroid camera and an antiquated database. This new application utilizes state-of-the-art digital photography which allows for the image to be stored and then retrieved, printed and

updated. This will also allow the Commission to establish an online data system and update our system for any futuristic uses designed by the JJC.

Almost all of you have been photographed already. If you have not received your new ID already, you will soon.

Coming Next Issue

**The JJC will mark
Corrections Officer of the Year
Week
by highlighting new initiatives
and achievements
of our custody staff.**